

BROADER FOCUS TO TACKLE ISLAMISM

AYAAN HIRSI ALI . The Daily Telegraph ; Surry Hills, N.S.W. [Surry Hills, N.S.W]27 Mar 2017: 20.

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FULL TEXT

Reports this month that students at Punchbowl Public School are acting out radical Islamic ideology is worrying but not a surprise. At the school, children as young as 10 have threatened teachers with violence, bullied other children into reading the Koran and professed their sympathies for those fighting for the Islamic State. This is in no way an exclusively Australian problem. Children in US, the UK and across Europe have reported similar radical Islamist sentiments. This tactic of brainwashing impressionable young people, indoctrinating them to become the next generation of jihadists, is an integral part of Islamist strategy.

In 2014 ViceNews broadcast a documentary The Islamic State; in it we hear from ISIS fighters in Syria and Iraq. One fighter says: "We Muslims are the ones who want to enforce sharia in this land. I swear to God, who is the only God, that sharia can only be established with weapons." A group of Islamic State fighters waving guns do wheelies on a dirt road in an armoured tank.

A boy of 14 says: "I'd like to join the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria and kill with them because they kill infidels and apostates." We hear from young boys at a mosque in Raqqa who swear their allegiance to fight for the Islamic State, and from a nine-year-old who is heading to an Islamic State camp to be trained in using a Kalashnikov rifle in order to fight the infidels.

Whether it is in Raqqa or Punchbowl the Islamist strategy with regard to children is the same: indoctrinate them, prevent critical thinking, then accept and implement sharia law. While the children in Sydney's western suburbs are not being handed guns, they are play-acting the violent instructions of political Islam. In this case, the weapon Islamists use is the mind.

There is an important distinction to be made between violent and nonviolent jihad. Violent attacks against "infidels" is jihad, whereas the process of indoctrination is dawa.

Dawa as practised by radical Islamists employs a wide range of mechanisms to advance their goal of imposing Islamic law on society.

In Western countries, dawa aims both to convert non-Muslims to political Islam and to instil Islamist views in existing Muslims.

The ultimate goal of dawa is to destroy the political institutions of a free society and replace them with the rule of sharia law.

Funding for dawa activities in the West comes from Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait and, until recently, the UAE. From 1973 through 2002, the Saudi kingdom spent an estimated \$87 billion to promote dawa abroad.

Generally, dawa activities in mosques and Islamic centres have no direct violent agenda themselves, but, as terrorism officials warn, many young Muslim men pass through these groups and find their way to an extremist, militant interpretation of their religion. We saw this in the UK in the 2000s, when the British government reeled from embarrassing revelations that it had partnered with, and in some cases funded, "nonviolent" Islamist groups espousing extreme viewpoints.

Then prime minister David Cameron noted that of individuals convicted of terrorist crimes in Britain, "it is clear that many of them were initially influenced by what some have called 'nonviolent extremists', and they then took those radical beliefs to the next level by embracing violence". In recognising the link between radical Islamist indoctrination and violence, Cameron announced "governments must also be shrewder in dealing with those who,

while not violent, are certainly, in some cases, part of the problem." From 9/11 until now, the dominant Western response to political Islam has been to focus only on "terror" and "violent extremism". Over that period, the US alone has spent at least \$1.7 trillion on combat and reconstruction costs in Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan and Pakistan. The total US budgetary cost of the wars and homeland security from 2001 through 2016 is more than \$3.6 trillion. Yet despite the enormity of resources spent and lives lost, today political Islam (or "Islamism") is on the rise around the world.

In focusing only on acts of violence, we have ignored the ideology that justifies, promotes, celebrates and encourages those acts. We need a new anti-dawa strategy, designed to check the advance of political Islam as an ideology and a movement.

Last week's terror attack in London demonstrated again that Islamists don't need hi-tech weapons to turn their violent thoughts into actions. It is difficult, if not impossible, to defend against terrorist attacks that use weapons that cannot be prohibited, such as cars.

We in the West must recognise that the weapon of the mind is what must be defended against by waging a war of ideas. The first step in a counter-dawa strategy is to map the individuals and organisations who promote dawa within Western borders.

Those Muslims who advocate the implementation of sharia and encourage members of their community to support Islamic State and the ideology of violent Islamism must be identified and stopped.

In addition, governments and civil society organisations must engage with Muslim communities in their borders and make it clear that indoctrinating children in radical Islamic thought and its promise of violence is not just wrong but a form of child abuse.

How can children who are brought up envisioning and acting out the destruction of the values of their home country be expected to flourish in society? They are being set up for failure or worse.

Australia is praised internationally for its successful integration of a high proportion of immigrants from many different religions and cultures.

But this record will be lost if the values and human rights guaranteed under Australian law are not communicated and understood by all members of the community.

Ayaan Hirsi Ali is a Research Associate at the Hoover Institution, Stanford University and Founder of the AHA Foundation. She will be speaking in Sydney, Brisbane, Melbourne and Auckland as a guest of Think Inc next week: thinkinc.org.au/events/hirsi-ali/

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DETAILS

Subject:	Islam; Ideology; Islamic law; Muslims; Weapons; Violence; Islamism; Nonviolence
Location:	United States–US Saudi Arabia Qatar Iraq United Kingdom–UK Kuwait Syria Europe
Company / organization:	Name: Islamic State of Iraq & the Levant–ISIS; NAICS: 813940
Publication title:	The Daily Telegraph; Surry Hills, N.S.W.
First page:	20
Publication year:	2017
Publication date:	Mar 27, 2017

Section:	OpEd
Publisher:	News Limited
Place of publication:	Surry Hills, N.S.W.
Country of publication:	Australia, Surry Hills, N.S.W.
Publication subject:	General Interest Periodicals—Australia
Source type:	Newspapers
Language of publication:	English
Document type:	News
ProQuest document ID:	1880891109
Document URL:	https://search.proquest.com/docview/1880891109?accountid=36155
Copyright:	(c) News Limited Australia. All rights reserved.
Last updated:	2017-11-23
Database:	ProQuest Central

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